

TENNESSEE

Musical Makes Cancer Messages Memorable

Based on data from the 2008 *United States Cancer Statistics* series, Tennessee ranks third among states in cancer mortality. Reducing this untenable statistic requires public education on cancer prevention and early detection, but who wants to sit through another boring presentation?

Tennessee's answer is cancer education disguised as entertainment provided via live performances of *Cancer Queens*, an original 45-minute musical staged at free events across the state.

Literature review of “edutainment” as a community education intervention, as well as results of a 2007 survey of programming needs of Tennessee Comprehensive Cancer Control Coalition (TC4) members, led to development of the musical. It presents cancer education in a non-threatening way and generates buy-in through popular songs. It capitalizes on existing cancer prevention knowledge by telling women to care for their health in a queenly manner.

A collaborative effort of the TC4 and its partners, *Cancer Queens* includes songs and skits that educate on breast and cervical cancer screening, skin cancer prevention, physical activity, diet, and smoking cessation. An “invitation to health” asks the audience to treat themselves like queens. Take-home materials reinforce the musical's messages. The volunteer eight-member cast includes six cancer educators and two survivors. None are professional performers. They made their own costumes and practice weekly. To develop a quality production, Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center covered the costs of a professional choreographer and professional vocalists.

Since the debut performance of *Cancer Queens* on October 21, 2008, the show or abbreviated versions of it has been staged more than a dozen times and delivered cancer control messages to more than 1,400 Tennessee women. After each show, audiences are asked to complete evaluation forms and provide follow-up contact information to assess the impact of the musical.

Universally, those completing evaluation forms immediately following the performances say they would recommend the show to others and that it is a helpful way to conduct cancer education.

Phone surveys conducted 6 months after shows with 10% of the troupe's 2008 audiences showed the following program impact:

- 75% had told other women about the need for screening mammograms or Pap smears.
- 75% had increased or maintained efforts to be physically active 30 minutes or more at least four days a week.
- 86% had tried to add more fruits and vegetables to their diet.
- 73% had used sunscreen when they otherwise may not have.
- 58% had read the list of cancer resources included in the show's program.
- 61% had kept the program for future reference.
- 100% said treating yourself like a queen means taking care of your health.
- Follow-up contacts with audiences continue.

Six *Cancer Queens* shows were scheduled across the state in October and November 2009. The Queens will collaborate with *All About Women* to offer health education to women across the state at the *All About Women* 2010 events in Nashville, Knoxville, and Memphis, and they have submitted a proposal to perform at the National Wellness Conference in Stevens Point, Wisconsin in July 2010.

Cancer Queens, a collaborative, synergistic effort of a small group of health educators and survivors, embodies the ideals of comprehensive cancer control by presenting meaningful cancer messages in a palatable and memorable way for Tennesseans to grasp and take home to their families.

Contact

Trudy Stein-Hart

Tennessee Department of Health

☎ 615-532-8505

✉ Trudy.stein-hart@tn.gov

🌐 <http://health.state.tn.us/CCCP>